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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this literature review is to produce a list of essential knowledge and skills for beginning principals. Research on the principalship falls into two distinct categories: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive research emphasizes the perceived or idealized role of the principal as "bold innovator" or "creative manipulator." Indepth descriptive research studies, on the other hand, reveal the principal as not so much an instructional leader as a master of human relations, a crisis intervenor, and a listener and counselor. Discrepancies between the perceived and the actual role of the principal could be reduced if the theoretical training of administators better reflected actual practice. Departments of educational administration responsible for preparing administrators should place more emphasis on people-handling skills and school districts should focus on this quality in selecting principals. Administrative internships, for example, can play a significant role in narrowing the gap between the perceived and the actual. The document concludes with two lists: (1) topics that should be covered in administrative theory courses (including management theory, public and human relations, education technology, and psychology); and (2) skills the researcher believes are necessary for a beginning principal (including motivation, crisis intervention, and delegating). (Author/PB)

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A B S T R A C T

TITLE: Essential Knowledges and Skills for Beginning Principals

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The purpose of this study was to synthesize a list of essential knowledges and skills for beginning principals.

Methodology used was the long-term obervation of a secondary school principal, interviews with second-year principals, survey of established principals and observation of principals by an administrative intern.

A review of the literature reveals that the jury is still out on what a principal does or should do. In-depth descriptive research studies reveal the principal, not so much as an instructional leader, but as a master of human relations, a crisis intervenor, a listener and counsellor. With this evidence in hand, it appears important that Departments of Educational Administration responsible for preparing administrators should place more emphasis on people-handling skills, and school districts should focus on this quality in selecting principals.

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ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGES AND SKILLS FOR BEGINNING PRINCIPALS

The purpose of this study was to synthesize a list of essential knowledges and skills for beginning principals from research on the principalship, from contemporary practitioners, and from the observations of an administrative intern.

Methodology used in this study involved the long-term observation of a secondary school principal, interviews with second year elementary principals, survey of established elementary and secondary principals, and observations of principals by an administrative intern.

What essential knowledges and skills does a fledgling principal need? Research on the principalship falls into two distinct categories; prescriptive and descriptive; the perceived and the actual. In the first category, Miklos (1972), saw the role of the principal evolving from that of an imitator (of other good principals), to that of innovator (the first in the district to instigate new teaching ideas), to that of planner (i.e., to identify the goals of his/her school). Trump (1972) and Ellis (1973) perceived the principal primarily as an educational leader, a "bold innovator" in the community. Ellis admitted that this role was being eroded by management duties which should be delegated to assistants.

Turnage (1971) described the role of the principal changing from that of "principal teacher" to that of a "creative manipulator," who must be knowledgeable of "social structures, political power and human interaction..." Mitchell (1972) saw the principal as "both the de factor and the de jure manager of the entire enterprise ... the man caught in the middle "between his clientele and his school board." Khlief (1971) described the principal as a "foreman" mediating between the school's central office and his various publics. Vidich and McReynolds (1971) perceived principals as "men on the defensive, confronting an educational world they neither made nor anticipated." Wiggins (1971) took the conservative viewpoint that a principal must be a conformer to the expectations of the school district; that is, to be like other principals, but at the same time to be

an individual and an innovator. Lipham and Hoeh (1974) acknowledged the discrepancy between the actual role of the principal and the idealized role.

The recognized classical descriptive research on the principalship is that of Wolcott (1973). In his book, The Man in Principal's Office, he described the day-to-day operation of an elementary school principal. He depicted the principal as a man whose day was taken up with, not just the formal aspects of administration, but with a host of informal encounters, mediations between students, staff, parents, the public and other administrators. He found that the principal's daily routine was dictated "by little problems brought to him or created by others rather than by any grand design of his own or what he wished to accomplish." He further noted that the greatest part of his principal's time was spent in an almost endless series of encounters, mostly face-to-face.

Kelly (1974), using ethnographical techniques, replicated several aspects of Wolcott's study, but with a secondary school principal. She found, like Wolcott, that her principal gave top priority to his students' welfare. This, coupled with the considerable amount of time spent at meetings away from the school, and at extra-curricular activities, resulted in minimal time given to formal duties such as budgeting, scheduling, and instructional guidance.

During the late 1970's, a wave of ethnographical studies on school administrators emerged. The majority of these tend to agree with, or confirm, the findings of Wolcott and Kelly. Most notable is that of Morris, et al (1981), who found that their principals spent most of their time monitoring the school, interacting with students, staff and parents, and not directly providing instructional leadership. By the same token, by maintaining a campus atmosphere conducive to good teaching and effective learning, the principal could be viewed as indirectly providing instructional leadership.

Based on research by Kelly in 1981 and 1982, on second year principals, another interesting aspect has emerged. These young principals, possibly through graduate courses in adminis-

tration, felt they knew what they should be doing; i.e., providing instructional leadership, but had guilt feelings that they did not have the time, and were not providing the leadership they learned about in theory courses.

It appears that there are considerable discrepancies between the perceived and the actual role of the principal. The question then arises whether the persons responsible for preparing principals should prepare them for the status quo, should brainwash them into striving for the ideal, or should present both sides of the coin so that new principals have some foundation for making choices as to where to direct their energies. Morris, et al, (1981) advance the theory that principals spend their time on what they enjoy doing and are good at, and avoid those activities in which they feel ill at ease.

It appears that there continues to be a need for future administrators to receive a foundation of knowledge of organization and administrative theory, planning, programming, budgeting, legal issues, etc., so that a generation of administrative illiterates is not bred. However, it has become evident that more emphasis needs to be placed on people-handling skills, human relations and public relations. Possibly the selection of potential administrators should focus on these skills.

More importantly, the potential administrator needs to be exposed to more than his or her building principal to observe different models at different levels. This is where the internship can play a crucial part. A relevant internship will include exposure to more than one principal model at more than one period of the school year. Ideally, the intern should participate in both the opening and the closing of the school year and, more importantly, see what goes on behind the scenes during the summer, when only the principal, assistant principal(s) and counsellor(s) are on duty. This might remove the myth that nothing is happening!

Some school districts, dissatisfied with the internships provided by Colleges of Education, have developed their own administrator training program. This should not occur. The preparation of the administrator should continue to be a cooperative venture between the university and the school district.

Following is a suggested list of topics that should be covered in administrative theory courses:

- Organizational Theory
- Management Theory
- Trends in Education
- Legal Issues
- Public Relations
- Curriculum Development
- Sociology
- Evaluation Techniques
- Inservice Organization
- Finance
- School Facilities
- Education Technology
- Human Relations
- Psychology

Listed below are the skills that the researcher believes are necessary for a beginning principal. These are based on the responses from contemporary principals.

- Interpersonal Communication
- Motivation (students, teachers, staff)
- Crisis Intervention (self, teachers)
- Time Management
- Public Relations
- Listening and Counselling (students, teachers, staff, parents, professional personnel)
- Scheduling
- Delegating
- GAS-ing (Getting the Attention of Superiors)
- Sponsoring
- Networking

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